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Tonthat, Tom

Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey California

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Virtual Town Halls keep communication flowing during ever-changing conditions

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Tom Tonthat | April 2, 2020



NPS President retired Vice Adm. Ann Rondeau, upper left, fields questions from the campus community with the assistance of, clockwise, Capt. Markus Gudmundsson, Dean of Students, outgoing Provost Dr. Steve Lerman, and Associate Provost for Graduate Education Dr. Ralucca Gera during a previous Virtual Town Hall.

As 'shelter in place' orders continue in an effort to reduce the spread of COVID-19, the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) community is making preparations for its next live Virtual Town Hall online. Now in its fourth iteration, the interactive gatherings, open to the entire campus and beyond, provide an invaluable opportunity for the community to come together while the mission continues from homes across the country.

"In these unprecedented times, keeping our community informed is critical," said NPS President retired Vice Adm. Ann Rondeau. "Providing access, live in real time, to the NPS experts who can answer most of our community's questions is critical as we press forward and maintain mission in this unique circumstance."

Instead of a pre-recorded news video updating the situation, the Virtual Town Hall allows

attendees to directly engage leadership, ask questions or bring up concerns during the course of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"In uncertainty, dialogue is essential," said Rondeau. "The Virtual Town Halls offer a chance for our faculty, students and staff to submit questions in advance, so I know what is on their minds. What the Provost, Chief of Staff and I cannot answer during the event, the staff works very hard to follow through and find answers and put on our [FAQ page](#)."

By addressing concerns such as setting up virtual classrooms or getting updated on new resources available with the university now nearly all online, the NPS population can spend less time stressing about these matters by getting a direct answer or reference from leader who knows. This in turn enables NPS faculty and staff to stay on mission, providing officers advanced education and research programs that increase intellectual advantage and warfighting effectiveness to enhance the security of the United States.

"The Town Halls have been an excellent way to share updates and policies in this quickly changing situation, said Dr. Sandi Leavitt, Director of the Graduate Writing Center and Thesis Processing Office. "Seeing NPS leadership and hearing them speak in one voice is reassuring and helps keep the sense that we're one community."

The Virtual Town Halls were made possible with existing capabilities of NPS' Information Technology and Communications Services (ITACS). ITACS has been quick to adapt in accordance to the changing conditions created by COVID-19.

"The coronavirus environment is extremely dynamic and our ability to provide the NPS population with timely, up-to-date information has been absolutely critical," said Navy Capt. Philip Old, NPS Chief of Staff. "Our ITACS team has been invaluable in getting all the pieces in place, quickly."

In addition to Virtual Town Halls, online resources and archives document new developments and policies to assist people either unable to attend the live online session or in need of resources for research.

"The wiki chats have also been invaluable for getting answers and knowing what others are dealing with," said Leavitt.

"Our leaders and managers across the school have been constantly engaged in support of our students, faculty and staff and our families, answering questions in real time," added Old. "We're maintaining mission, successfully, and this is a big part of how we're doing it."

NPS will hold its next Virtual Town Hall on Thursday, April 2, at 1500 via the public viewing link: <https://www.nps.edu/watchlive>.